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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DHAKA 000207

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [PINS](#) [ETRD](#) [BG](#)
SUBJECT: BANGLADESH GOVERNMENT PRAISED FOR PEACEFUL
SUPPRESSION OF REBELLION

REF: A. DHAKA 161
[1](#)B. DHAKA 204

Classified By: Ambassador James F. Moriarty. Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) On 2/27, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government basked in praise for peacefully ending a two-day insurgency among paramilitary border guards. Hasina and the Chief of Army Staff were among visitors to the Bangladesh Rifles Headquarters in central Dhaka, where search teams reportedly uncovered scores of bodies feared to be those of army officers killed in the insurgency. Concern remained that the military might seek bloody revenge on the mutineers who killed their army commanders. Although the discovery of a mass grave at the Headquarters and upcoming funerals of slain officers could fuel tension, politicians and the military alike through 1700 local time on 2/27 have handled the rebellion with a maturity and respect for democratic norms often missing in Bangladesh..

DAY THREE: A SEARCH FOR BODIES

[1](#)2. (C) The active rebellion of Bangladesh Rifle paramilitary troops against their army officers ended 2/26 after Hasina in a nationally televised speech threatened to use force if they did not surrender. She reiterated her offer of a general amnesty and her promise to address concerns raised by the rank-and-file over pay, benefits and allegations of corruption among Bangladesh Rifles leaders (reftel B). White flags of surrender appeared throughout Bangladesh Rifles Headquarters, the epicenter of the mutiny, as tanks surrounded the compound in central Dhaka. Media reported the capture of many mutineers with an unknown number of others believed to have escaped amid the chaos. Law enforcement officials reported Bangladesh Rifle bases around the country appeared quiet on 2/27, a day after the insurrections spread in solidarity with the rebels in Dhaka.

[1](#)3. (C) The main activity on 2/27 was a search at the Headquarters compound in Dhaka for scores of missing army officers who commanded the Rifles and were feared killed by the mutineers at the beginning of the insurgency. The government did not release a tally of confirmed dead; television station NTV reported at 17:00 local time a death count of about 50, but it was unclear whether the number included civilians. There also were contradictory reports late in the afternoon on the number of bodies uncovered in a mass grave at Headquarters. Some media estimates expected the

death toll would go much higher and could perhaps near 150.

PRAISE FOR HASINA AND THE OPPOSITION

14. (C) Local media praised Hasina for quelling the rebellion peacefully. "So far, the government ... has been on the right track to defuse the tension by way of a sustained process of peaceful negotiation," the English-language newspaper The New Age said in an editorial that reflected the sentiment of other media. An opinion piece in The Daily Star said "kudos must go to the government for its mature handling and resolution of the issue." The author added that Hasina's arch-rival, opposition leader Khaleda Zia, also deserved praise for showing "admirable restraint and solidarity," Indeed, in a statement issued late 2/26, Zia offer to help the government "in every way possible."

CONCERN ABOUT TENSION WITHIN THE ARMY

15. (C) While The Daily Star opinion piece applauded the army for acting under civilian control throughout the rebellion, it also expressed hope for continued restraint as the bodies of more officers were uncovered. Hasina's actions throughout 2/27 showed solidarity with the grieving army: She visited injured officers in hospital and she announced the dead would be buried with state honors; news reports said Saturday and Sunday would be official days of mourning. Television news also reported Hasina visited the Bangladesh Rifles

DHAKA 00000207 002 OF 002

Headquarters, where Chief of Army Staff General Moeen Udin Ahmed and Home Affairs Minister Sahara Khatun already were observing the ongoing search operation for more bodies. During her hospital visit, Hasina stressed the general amnesty would not apply to those who committed crimes such as murder, which could help convince the military the deaths would not go unavenged. Still, Western diplomats expressed concern about rising passions within the army ranks; one potential flashpoint would be the funeral for slain officers scheduled late afternoon on 2/27 in Dhaka; other funerals could follow as the authorities uncover more bodies. Initial reports from the first funeral suggested emotions ran high as troops vented anger at senior government and ruling party officials.

CONCLUSION: HELPING KEEP THE LID ON

16. (C) Throughout the crisis, the Embassy has urged Bangladesh's leaders to follow democratic norms such as civilian control of the military. The Ambassador spoke by phone with both Hasina and Zia; he assured the prime minister of USG support (reftel B) and he applauded the opposition leader for acting responsibly during a time fraught with danger for Bangladesh's fragile democracy. Zia told the Ambassador she was willing to work with the government for the good of the nation and thanks him for the call. The Embassy's focus now turns to the military to ensure its continued responsible and restrained response to a rebellion that left many of its officers dead. We are reaching out to government advisers who oversee the military as well as leading officers who will play a critical role in preventing bloody vengeance against the mutineers.
MORIARTY